

Gender Inequality in Multicultural Families: Reality and Policy Implications

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The purpose of this study is to identify the reality of gender inequality within Korea's multicultural families, and the negotiation patterns of the parties involved to solve the problem. Furthermore, this study took an approach to examine the relationship between gender negotiation of multicultural families and gender equality practice in society as a whole. Based on these findings, this study sought policy direction to alleviate the issue of gender inequality in multicultural families. In this regard, this study focuses on multicultural families composed of foreign wives and Korean husbands. A survey of 500 wives from Vietnam, the Philippines and China (excluding Korean-Chinese) and their 257 Korean husbands was carried out along with an interview of 22 foreign wives and 5 Korean husbands to analyze the result. In addition, the study reanalyzed the data from 2015 National Survey of Multicultural Families in conjunction with analysis of policy data and interviews with experts in the field.

The major findings are as follows. The status of female immigrants in the family: Foreign wives were faced with a complex problem not only in the

unequal situation in their family life but also the cause of inequality is blamed as their lack of competence. The burden of housework and care work was more concentrated on women, while the rights of women were limited. In the case of children 's education, the female immigrants were in a somewhat peripheral position with a less burden but had low authority. In the case of household and child care sharing, a small change is taking place, but the problem in distribution of economic rights hardly showed a room for change.

The employment and work-life balance of female immigrants: It appears that employment can act in a positive direction to improve unequal relations in terms of women's decision-making rights in family life but it was confirmed that it did not bring about any other change in terms of fulfilling their domestic roles. In other words, regardless of whether or not they are employed, the gender assumption of 'housework and care work are meant for women' still persisted. Even though women are inevitably forced to postpone employment during the period of child care, when there is a chance for work-life balance, they seek to find jobs that are compatible. However in this organized double-burden system, it is prone to break down in the road.

The relationship with family of origin: There is a tendency in Korea's social viewpoint that female marriage immigrants would provide a substantial economic aid to their families back home. However, the results of the survey showed that there were many cases in which intermarriage couples live with or next to husband's parents to provide financial support and care work to them. It is true that they provide some financial support to the wife's family of origin, but a reciprocal relationship is formed in a way that these families come to Korea to help provide housework or care work. In this respect, the relationship of the international marriage couple and their families of origin is highly unbalanced and there is a tendency of laying the burden of housework and care work to the bride's family overseas as well.

Negotiation for change in gender order: According to the interview participants,

the foreign wives have tried to negotiate the reconstruction of the gender order with their husbands. This is due to the gap they are experiencing between the expectation they had about the family life versus the reality where the burden of housework and care work is unilaterally laid upon them and how the rights to make major part of their life are limited such as economic freedom and driving a vehicle. However, the foreign wives' demands are faced with indifference, explicit rejection or lukewarm noncooperation by the husbands. In addition, the in-laws from husband's side enter the scene, who emphasize that this order is the 'Korean Style' and demand them to follow. In this sense, the couple's attempt in gender negotiation is transformed into admonishing affair of the foreign daughter-in-law. The negotiation for change in gender order tend to cease without progress because gender inequality in their family life is re-packaged as the 'Korean style of order' to obey as a situation that they have to accept for living in Korea like cultural custom to follow.

Gender inequality and family conflict: The results of the survey showed that women had more experience of marital conflict in the group with high burden of housework and care work. The result of the reanalysis of the 2015 National Survey of Multicultural Families showed that in the case of the couples of wives with relatively flexible attitude on gender role, and Korean husbands with rigid sense of gender role, family satisfaction was low and marital conflict was high. These results suggest that the burden of unequal family life is transferred to a foreign wife who has high expectation and demand for gender equality and it seems to reflect the reality that family conflict is on the rise because of this gap.

Possible change of gender structure of multicultural family: It seems the biggest obstacles that hinder the progress in gender negotiations are starting to weaken. The husbands who have refused to change or have reacted with only lukewarm responses have been showing signs of change. It is becoming evident that it is difficult for families to overcome the hurdles of life by consistently asking

foreign wives to be ‘faithful to housework’ and claiming ‘they lack in competence to share economic power’. There is a growing awareness of the need to reconstruct the overall gender order, including the role of oneself and wife, and the capacity and authority of foreign wives. On the other hand, in gender negotiations, the migrant women’s network is likely to play a supportive role for women who are engaging in gender negotiation in multifaceted ways when the network is to promote common awareness of problems and move toward the direction of action.

Gender Negotiation of Multicultural Families and Gender Equality Practice: Among the female immigrants who have participated in the interview, the different backgrounds of Korean women and themselves are clearly recognized. And surprisingly, they do not perceive the two groups may be in a similar situation in terms of gender structure such as division of domestic work and rights. In fact, many foreign wives perceive that ‘Korean women’ are like the ‘Korean in-laws’ or ‘husbands’ who have internalized and reproduced the ‘Korean’ gender order and have not accepted their demands to change unequal family life. Unless the gap between the different groups of women close, there is only a little possibility of forming a common interest in the issue of gender inequality as women who live in the realities of Korean society.

Based on the results of the study, the policy direction is proposed as follow. For the future direction of multicultural family policy, this study suggests first, establishment of multicultural family policy promotion foundation for gender equality and family life, second, enhancement of the service providers’ capacity to secure gender equality in multicultural family support center projects, third, implementation of comprehensive gender impact assessment on the projects and programs of the multicultural family support center, and fourth, development of variety of services and programs to support gender negotiations for gender-equal family relationships. For the future direction of gender equality policy, the study suggests first, establishment of direction of gender equality policy integrating

multicultural families and second, provision of measures to prevent blind spots in gender equality policy.